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A REPORT FOR PEOPLE WHO RUN ANNUAL CONFERENCES

The Last Four Weeks

Why nearly half of your attendees now register in the final month, who actually shows up, and how to plan when the pace report is behind.

DATA AS OF
September 23, 2026

LENGTH
About 25 minutes

WRITTEN FOR
Directors of meetings, association leaders, and conference and sponsorship teams

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly half of your attendees will register in the last four weeks. Most of them will show up.

Every conference has a week when the pace report is behind and someone asks for a number. This report is for that week. It pulls together what has been published in the last year on when people register, who registers late, who fails to arrive, and what the lateness actually costs. The short version: late registration is now normal, the late registrants are the first-timers and the neighbors you most want, and they are no less likely to show up than anyone else. The problem is not the attendee. It is a planning calendar, a hotel contract and a sponsor deck that were all built for a decision the attendee no longer makes in month three. One caution before the numbers: nobody has published a registration curve for association annual meetings on their own. The two datasets here are large trade shows and one platform's mostly smaller events, and the text says which is which wherever it uses them.

Attendees who registered inside four weeks

45%

2023 data across 30 trade shows, Maritz, published 2024

Events behind their regular registration pace

50%

2025, Freeman, January 2026

Median no-show rate at live events

20%

1,070+ events, PheedLoop, April 2026

Five findings

1. **Late is stable behavior, not a bad year.** Half of events ran behind their regular registration pace in 2025. Freeman's year-end recap calls late registration "stable behavior, not an anomaly," notes that on-site registration is dropping, and tells organizers to expect more late cancellations now that hotel and airline penalties have softened. In the last large behavioral study, 45 percent of attendees registered inside four weeks, 29 percent inside two, and 9 percent on site. At 467 events on one platform, in data published in September 2026, the median registration arrived 35 days out.[1,2,3]

2. **The late registrants are your first-timers and your neighbors.** Forty-seven percent of first-time attendees register late against 25 percent of repeat attendees. Sixty-two percent of people within driving distance register late against 39 percent of those who fly. And the late registrants spend more once they arrive: $59 more on add-ons than people who registered 90 or more days out.[2]

3. **Late registrants are not flakier.** Pooled across events, same-week registrants fail to show at 42 percent against 18 percent for people who registered six months out. Compare late and early registrants at the same event and the median gap is 0.6 points (median attendance 84.1 percent for early registrants, 80.8 for late), and at 44 percent of events the late registrants attend more reliably. Timing predicts what kind of event it is, not who will come.[3]

4. **Free is what predicts a no-show.** The median live event loses 20 percent of expected attendees, and 17 percent of events lose more than half. Free events run at 28 percent against 17 percent for paid, and small free events at 37 percent. Among paid events, the share of started registrations that were completed showed no relationship with no-shows.[4,5]

5. **The cost lands on the hotel block, the sponsor pitch and the forecast.** Hotel cut-off dates are still typically 30 days before arrival, which is before nearly half the audience has registered. Maritz lists late registration hurting room blocks among the challenges for large conferences in 2026. Seven in ten meeting professionals expect cost per attendee to rise, and 40 percent of planners expect attendance to fall by 10 percent or more in 2026.[2,20,21,23]

One ask

Build the pace report by days out against the last two editions, put the hotel pickup on the same page, and price by benefit tier with a deadline you keep. Section 6 shows how a team of two does it in a spreadsheet.

SECTION 1

Late is the new normal

1.1 The pace report that is always behind

There is a Tuesday, about eight weeks out, when the registration count gets compared with the same Tuesday last year and comes up short. The email that follows asks whether marketing should push harder, whether the early-bird deadline should be extended, and whether the hotel block should be cut. Half of the organizers Freeman tracked had that Tuesday in 2025: 50 percent of events were behind their regular registration pace. Freeman does not say how many events that covers.[1]

Freeman's January 2026 recap is unusually direct about what that means. "Organizers watched registrations arrive closer to event dates, tracking behind previous years. But late registration is now stable behavior, not an anomaly." It adds a detail that changes the picture: "'late' doesn't necessarily mean last-minute, as on-site registrations are dropping significantly."[1] People are deciding later, but they are still deciding before they get in the car. The sixth of Freeman's six adjustments for 2026 is two words long: expect later registration.[1]

The same report names a second shift that gets less attention. On-site registration is dropping, "and organizers shouldn't rely on day-of registration bumps. Instead, they may expect more late cancellations: last minute hotel and airfare cancellations are no longer tied to steep penalties like in years past, allowing attendees to skip an event at the last minute."[1] The attendee who used to be locked in by a non-refundable fare is now free until the morning of the flight.

Why it hurts is not mysterious. As one trade analysis put it in March 2026, the industry "depends on early commitments to forecast revenue, plan logistics and reassure sponsors."[6] Freeman is harder on its own readers: investment dollars in 2025 "targeted early registration numbers, treating them as a reliable predictor of success," and they were not one.[1]

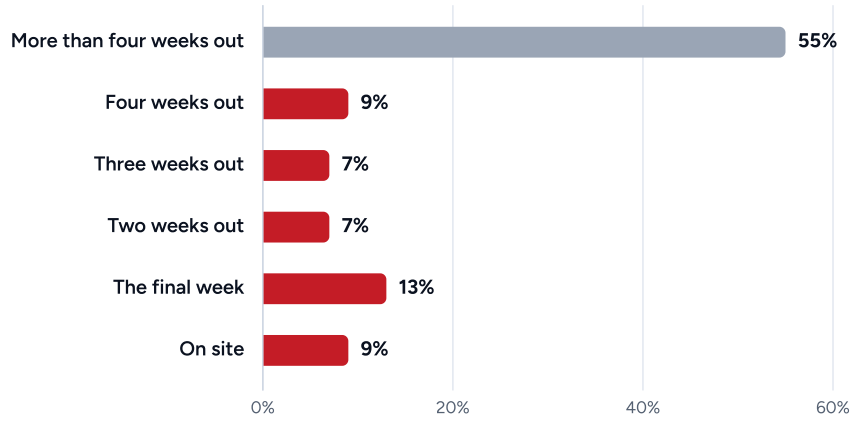
1.2 What the registration records say

The most detailed public look at when people actually register is still Maritz's Registration Insights Report, published in 2024 from more than 360,000 registration records at 30 trade shows over 2021 to 2023. It is the last behavioral series of its size anyone has published, and its distribution figures are 2023 data, so they are dated here as such. In 2023, 55 percent of attendees registered more than four weeks out. Nine percent registered in the fourth week before the event, 7 percent in the third, 7 percent in the second, 13 percent in the final week, and 9 percent on site. Add the last five bands and 45 percent registered inside four weeks, 29 percent inside two, and 22 percent in the week of the event.[2]

The trend inside that series is smaller than the headlines suggest. Inside two weeks: 23 percent in 2019, 29 percent in 2023. In the week of the event: 24 percent in 2022, as shows came back, and 22 percent in 2023. Maritz's own reading: "late registrations aren't a new phenomenon. They were prevalent even before COVID. But the pandemic didn't do us any favors."[2]

FIGURE 1 **When attendees registered, 2023**

Share of attendees by how far before the event they registered, across 30 trade shows. The five bands in red are the "late registrants," 45 percent in total.



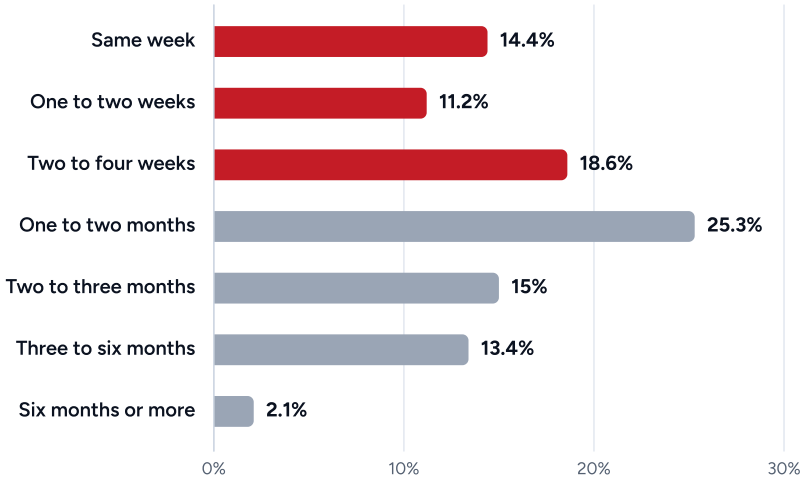
Source: Maritz, Registration Insights Report, 2024 (2023 data; more than 360,000 registrations, 30 trade shows).[2]

A newer and differently shaped dataset arrived in September 2026. PheedLoop, an event platform whose published size bands show many small events among its customers, analyzed 216,282 registrations with usable timestamps at 467 live events on its system. The median registration arrived 35 days before the event; a quarter arrived within 13 days and a quarter more than 68 days out. By band: 14.4 percent of registrations came in the same week, 11.2 percent one to two weeks out, 18.6 percent two to four weeks out, 25.3 percent one to two months out, 15.0 percent two to three months out, 13.4 percent three to six months out, and 2.1 percent six months or more out. That is 44 percent inside four weeks, next to Maritz's 45.[3]

The two studies count different things. Maritz counts attendees at large trade shows that it registers, on-site registrants included; PheedLoop counts registrations, no-shows included, at its customers' events, many of them free. The two curves meet at four weeks and differ elsewhere, so read the match as a coincidence at one point rather than corroboration. What holds across both is the shape: most decisions in the last two months, and a large share in the last four weeks.

FIGURE 2 **Registration lead time at 467 live events, 2026**

Share of 216,282 registrations by how far before the event they were completed. Bands in red are inside four weeks.



Source: PheedLoop, Event Data Lab Report #09, September 10, 2026. Events with at least 50 completed registrations; 5.1 percent of records dated after the event were excluded.[3]

One practitioner who sells to associations describes the same shape from the other side of the desk. "It's very common to see at least 40% of an association's event attendees register within the last six weeks," the head of marketing at 360 Live Media, an events agency that serves associations, told Meetings Today in August 2026.[7] At free events the curve is steeper still. In PheedLoop's data, the median lead time at free events was 16 days against 41 at paid events, and 69 percent of free-event registrations arrived inside 30 days against 38 percent at paid events.[3]

1.3 Why people wait

Freeman's answer is that the incentives were never built for the attendee. "Current incentives primarily benefit organizers and exhibitors," it writes: early-bird pricing for cash flow, confirmed numbers for sponsor pitches. "Attendees see through this." What locks in a registration, in Freeman's words, is "benefits tied to their business goals, not the operational convenience of planners."[1] Its May 2026 study of nearly 20,000 people who did not attend a specific event found value for the cost the leading consideration, and 60 percent said education available only in person would make them more likely to come.[8]

There is also a calendar problem that has nothing to do with the event. Skift Meetings' Megatrends report for 2026 describes planning windows "sometimes less than 3 months," compressed by last-minute budget approvals and policy uncertainty.[9] If the organizer is sourcing a venue inside three months, the attendee's employer is approving the trip inside one. Or, as the same agency executive put it: "Calendar anxiety is a real thing; committing to a multiday event even four months in advance feels risky for people."[7]

One source reads the year differently, and it belongs here. RainFocus, whose customers are mostly large corporate technology events, wrote in December 2025 that pre-pandemic registration patterns "have resurfaced" and that early registration launches "are once again creating elongated, predictable patterns" that let its customers forecast more accurately than in the previous three years.[10] RainFocus does not say how many events that covers. Both statements can be true. A launch-driven corporate event with a known audience paces differently from an

association annual meeting, and Freeman's 50 percent is blended across everything it serves. The point for a reader is not which curve is right. It is that the curve for your event is knowable, and Section 6 shows how to draw it.

> **SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY**
>
> Export every registration from your last two editions with its timestamp, and count how many arrived inside four weeks. If your systems cannot give you that timestamp, that is the first finding.

SECTION 2

Who registers late, and why it is not the people you think

2.1 First-timers and neighbors

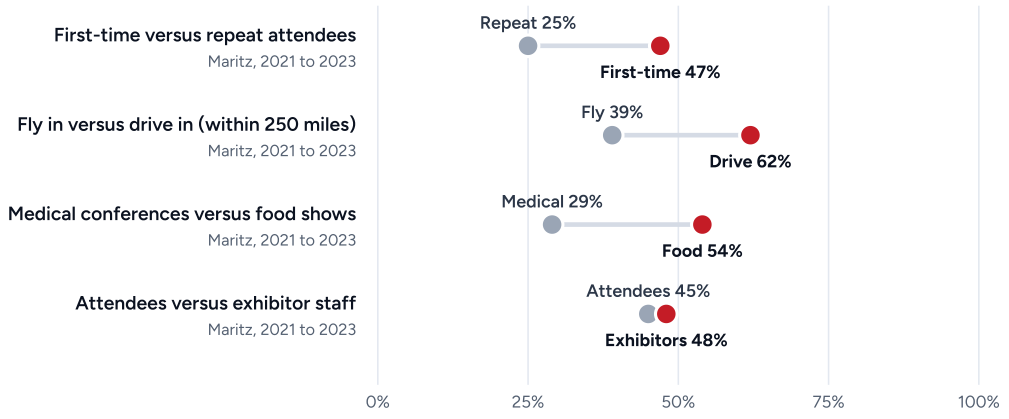
The organizer's picture of the late registrant is the veteran who knows the drill and waits. The data says the opposite. In Maritz's 2021 to 2023 registrations, which the report does not break out by year for this split, 47 percent of first-time attendees registered inside four weeks against 25 percent of repeat attendees. "Said simply," the report notes, "your veteran attendees aren't the problem: 75% of them are registering early."[2] First-timers wait because they are not yet sure the event is worth it, and because they may be waiting for a colleague to decide first.

Distance is the second predictor. Sixty-two percent of attendees living within 250 miles of the venue registered late, against 39 percent of those who had to fly. A flight forces a decision a month out; a drive does not. It follows that where the event is held changes the curve: Nashville's shows saw 81 percent register late, New York's 63 percent, Minneapolis's 22 percent.[2] Profession is the third. At medical and healthcare conferences only 29 percent registered late; at food and restaurant shows, 54 percent. Maritz suggests continuing-education credit as one reason the medical, legal and financial professions commit earlier.[2]

Exhibitors are not exempt. Forty-eight percent of exhibitor staff registered inside four weeks, slightly more than the 45 percent of attendees. The company signs a year out; who staffs the booth is decided in the last month.[2]

FIGURE 3 **Who registers late**

Share registering inside four weeks, for four pairs. The red dot is the group more likely to register late.



Source: Maritz, Registration Insights Report, 2024 (2021 to 2023 registrations; not broken out by year for these splits). "Drive" means within 250 miles of the venue.[2]

THE FIRST-TIMER WINDOW

The people an event most needs to grow are the ones who decide last. That is uncomfortable for a marketing calendar built around an early-bird deadline, because the deadline lands months before a first-timer is ready. It also means the pace report understates first-time registrations for most of the cycle. If you split the pace report by first-time and repeat, the repeat line will look like last year's by week eight and the first-time line will not, and that is normal.

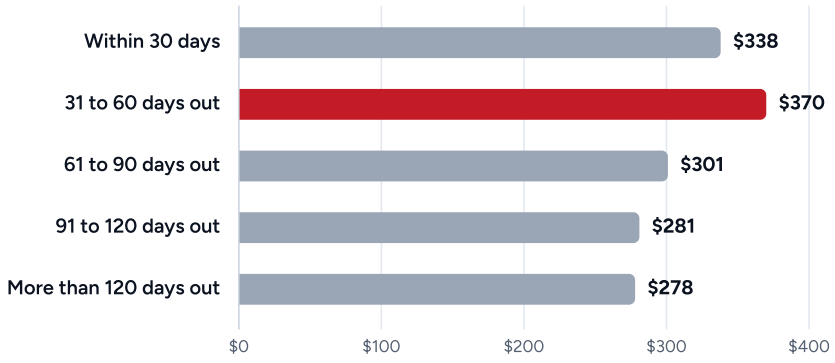
2.2 Late registrants spend more

Maritz manages registration for every show in its sample, so it can see what people bought after the fee. The finding it calls the showstopper: late registrants spend more on add-ons than early registrants, "even when we factor out early-bird discounts." Those who registered inside four weeks spent $59 more on sessions, on-demand content and social events than those who registered more than 90 days out.[2]

Cut finer, the curve peaks just outside the panic zone. Attendees who registered within 30 days spent $338 beyond the fee; 31 to 60 days out, $370; 61 to 90 days, $301; 91 to 120 days, $281; and beyond 120 days, $278. The earliest registrants spent $92 less than the 31 to 60 day group, before counting the discount they were given for being early.[2] Maritz does not net the add-on spend against the higher fee late registrants pay or the discount early ones receive, so the full income statement is yours to build; both effects point the same way, since the late registrant pays more and buys more. Maritz offers three explanations: the earliest registrants signed up before the full program was listed and never came back for add-ons; they are repeat attendees on autopilot; and they are the most price-sensitive, which is why the discount found them.

FIGURE 4 **Spend beyond the registration fee, by registration window**

Average per attendee on add-ons such as extra sessions, on-demand content and social events. The 31 to 60 day window is in red.



Source: Maritz, Registration Insights Report, 2024 (2021 to 2023 data, 30 trade shows).[2]

The people who run that dataset drew the conclusion themselves. "I think there's this sense that late registrations are bad," Maritz's market insights manager told Meetings Today, "yet we learned that late registrants can actually be some of our most lucrative attendees in terms of how they're spending."[11] The same article prints the first-timer figure the wrong way round, as 75 percent registering late; the report's own 47 percent is used here. Her colleague, the chief operating officer for business events, put it in four words: "Late registration is a feature, not a bug."[12] Both work for a registration provider, and their data is trade shows. The direction still holds for anyone who sells a workshop, a dinner or a recording after the ticket.

2.3 What an early-bird discount actually buys

Put the two findings together and the standard early-bird discount looks expensive. It is claimed by the repeat attendees who register early anyway, it rewards the group that spends least on add-ons, and Freeman's research says attendees see it for what it is. Maritz says it plainly: "you might be giving away money to the very people who would attend your show regardless: those repeat attendees."[2] Its suggestions are to shorten the discount window or hold a flat rate that steps up at four weeks, to aim the marketing push at the 31 to 120 day window, and to offer promo codes to first-timers and students instead of a blanket discount.[2,13] Early-bird pricing exists for reasons the data does not erase. Early registrations fund deposits, and they are the evidence a hotel asks for before it will hold a block. Any change to the discount has to replace those two things, which is why Maritz's suggestion is to move and shrink it rather than remove it.

The association case in Meetings Today's August 2026 piece points the same way. An accounting association moved its 2025 annual meeting to registration tiers that differed in benefits as well as price: early access to speaker announcements and session details, limited-capacity roundtables, and presenter access for the earlier tiers. Attendance rose 7 percent to a record of more than 4,000, and revenue rose by more than that. The agency behind it names one rule as critical: "Deadline extensions undermine strategy," because members learn that they can wait.[7] A second agency executive in the same article adds the first-timer caveat: new prospects need convincing, and a discount does not move someone who has never been.[7]

> **SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY**
>
> Pull last year's registrations with three columns: registration date, first-time or repeat, and total spend including add-ons. Sort by date. If the early birds spent the least, you have the case for changing the discount.

SECTION 3

The no-show is a different problem

3.1 One in five, and sometimes half

The second worry hiding inside the pace report is the badge that is printed and never picked up. Until 2026 the numbers for that were mostly survey answers and vendor ranges. PheedLoop's Event Data Lab put a measured figure on it in April: across more than 1,070 live events with check-in data on its platform, the median event lost about 20 percent of its expected attendees. The mean is 29 percent, pulled up by a tail of bad cases: 17 percent of events lost more than half of their expected attendance, while 21 percent lost 10 percent or less.[4]

The definition matters. PheedLoop counts a no-show as an expected attendee who never produced a check-in, so speakers and non-registrant participants are included, and events with a check-in rate above 100 percent were capped.[4] The population matters too: these are PheedLoop's customers, and the size bands show a lot of small events. Events expecting 10 to 49 people ran a 32 percent median no-show; 50 to 149, 23 percent; and everything from 150 up settled at 18 to 19 percent.[4] For an annual conference the relevant line is the last one: about one in five.

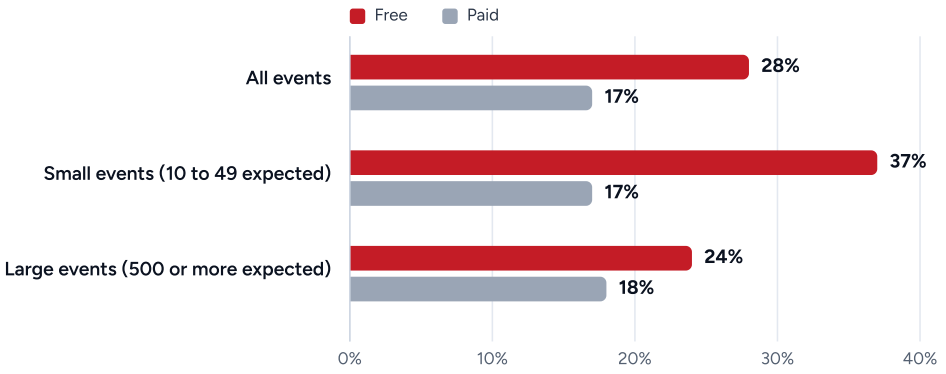
3.2 Free is the predictor

Whether the ticket cost money predicts the no-show rate better than anything else in the dataset. Free events ran a 28 percent median no-show across 389 events; paid events 17 percent across 683. The gap widens where it hurts:

small free events lost 37 percent against 17 percent for small paid events, and large free events 24 percent against 18 percent.[4]

FIGURE 5 **Median no-show rate, free against paid**

Share of expected attendees who did not check in, by whether the event charged.



Source: PheedLoop, Event Data Lab Report #05, April 29, 2026 (1,070+ live events; free n = 389, paid n = 683). Small is 10 to 49 expected attendees; large is 500 or more.[4]

A follow-up in May tested the obvious alternative, that a harder registration form filters out the uncommitted. It found nothing of the kind. Among paid events, in the 195 events with registration-level data, the no-show rate sat between 16 and 19 percent whatever the share of started registrations that were completed. Free events had a median completion rate of 96 percent and one ticket type; paid events 86 percent and eight ticket types. "Payment, not friction, is the commitment filter" is PheedLoop's summary, and its September addendum, which compared payers and non-payers inside the same events, found the payers 2 to 4 points more likely to show, in 57 and 65 percent of events across the two tests it ran.[5]

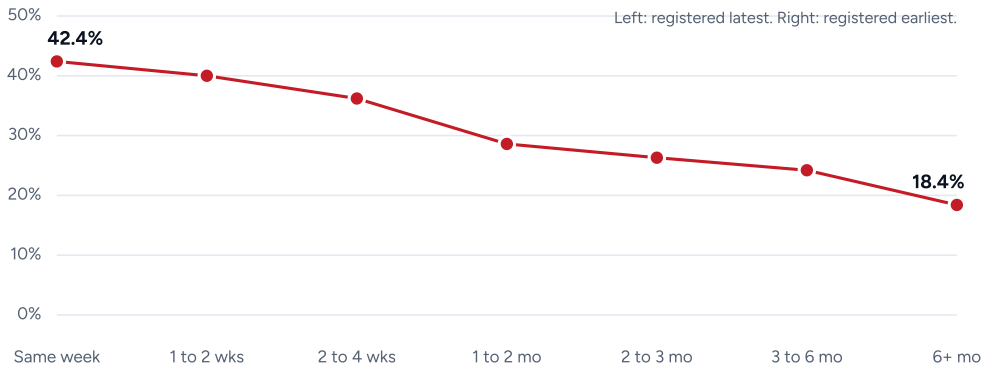
One organizer tested the same idea on a single event this summer, and the numbers are worth reporting with their size. For a breakfast event in Chicago, the chief executive of 37signals charged a $100 deposit, refunded at the door. Fifty-five people registered and 50 came, a 90 percent show rate, against 84 registered and 38 attending at the company's previous free event. Fewer registrations, more people in the room. "It costs you money not to be there," he told Skift Meetings. An event psychology advisor quoted in the same piece added that "the act itself signals commitment. The dollar amount is less important in general."[14] It is one event with 55 registrations. It is also the mechanism PheedLoop's data describes.

3.3 Late registrants are not flakier

Now the finding that separates the two problems. Pooled across all 467 events in PheedLoop's September study, people who registered in the same week failed to show 42.4 percent of the time, and the rate fell steadily with lead time to 18.4 percent for those who registered six months or more out.[3] That is the chart every organizer expects to see, and it is in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6 **No-show rate by registration lead time, pooled**

Share of registrations that did not check in, by how far out they were made, across 467 events. Read the caption before acting on it.



Source: PheedLoop, Event Data Lab Report #09, September 10, 2026. Pooled across events. The six-months-or-more band holds 4,548 registrations, 2.1 percent of the sample. Within the same event, the median gap between early and late registrants was 0.6 points.[3]

Then PheedLoop asked the better question: inside the same event, do late registrants show up less? For 374 events with at least 20 registrations on each side of a 30-day line, early registrants had a median attendance of 84.1 percent and late registrants 80.8 percent. The median within-event difference was 0.6 percentage points. At 55 percent of events the gap was under 5 points, and at 44 percent of events the late registrants attended more reliably than the early ones.[3] The pooled curve is mostly the free-event curve in disguise: free events fill late and lose people; paid events fill early and keep them. Same-week registrants at free events checked in at 28.2 percent, at paid events 72.8 percent. PheedLoop's conclusion: "Registration timing does not predict attendance. It predicts what kind of event someone is registering for."[3]

For a paid conference, then, the late registrant is a person who decided, paid and is coming. The reason to worry about the last four weeks is not that those people will not turn up. It is everything in Section 4.

TWO PROBLEMS, NOT ONE

- **Late registration** is a timing problem. It is predicted by first-time status, distance and profession, and it costs you in forecasting, hotel blocks and sponsor confidence.
- **No-shows** are a commitment problem. They are predicted by whether the ticket was free and by how small the event is, and they cost you in catering, badge stock and a room that looks emptier than the count.
- The first does not cause the second. Treating them as one leads to the wrong fix: pushing early registration to reduce no-shows, when the lever for no-shows is price.

3.4 Which attendance rate is right

Readers who have seen other benchmarks will have a different number in mind, and the numbers disagree because they measure different things. Bizzabo's 2025 survey of 1,558 organizers and attendees found 37 percent of organizers reporting a registration-to-attendance conversion of 20 to 40 percent for in-person conferences.[15] Bizzabo's March 2026 platform benchmark, drawn from mature organizations running an average of 25 events a year, shows 412 registrations and 269 attendees per event, a 52 percent attendance rate, with the attendance rate

not split by format (63 percent of the events were in person, 33 percent virtual and 4 percent hybrid).[16] PheedLoop's live events check in at about 80 percent at the median.[4] Goldcast's 2026 webinar benchmark, from 26,190 webinars, puts webinar attendance at 40 percent of registrations.[17]

Put side by side, the spread is explained by three choices: whether the events are in person or on a screen, whether the denominator is registrations or expected attendees, and whose customers are being counted. The honest working rule for an annual conference: at a paid in-person event expect roughly one in six expected attendees not to check in; at a free one, one in four or worse; at a webinar, more than half of registrants. Two limits on the first two numbers: PheedLoop does not say how many of its events are conferences, and it publishes the free-against-paid split by size only for small and large events, so the midsize cross is unpublished.

3.5 The sync-failure trap

There is one more reason no-show counts are folklore, and it is a data problem rather than a behavior. When the registration system and the CRM disagree, a no-show and a failed status update look identical. A Marketo administrator on Adobe's forum, in a thread that carries no date, reported that "only 50% of the people attended our most recent event ended up with their status changed."[18] That was not a room half empty. It would have looked like one in the report.

PheedLoop's own inclusion rule is the right standard: it only analyzed events where more than 90 percent of check-ins could be linked to a registration.[3] A no-show is only countable from a check-in record that is tied to the same person as the registration. Anything else is a reconciliation exercise, and the number that comes out of it is whatever the spreadsheet says that day.

> **SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY**
>
> Take your last event and compute the no-show rate two ways: from the registration system alone, and from check-in records linked to registrations. If the two numbers differ by more than a few points, the sync is the story, not the attendees.

SECTION 4

The cut-off math: hotels, sponsors and budgets

4.1 The hotel decides before the attendee does

If the late registrant is coming, why does late registration cost so much? Because three commitments are made on a calendar the attendee no longer follows, and the first is the hotel. Group room blocks carry a cut-off date, after which unsold rooms go back to the hotel, and an attrition clause that charges the organizer if the block is not filled to an agreed share. Maritz's 2024 report notes that supplier cut-off dates "are still typically 30 days from the event date," and practice guides put the range at 21 to 45 days.[2,19] The attrition threshold is set contract by contract, and nobody publishes a distribution of them. None of that is a statistic; it is how the contracts are written. Set it against the registration curve and the problem is arithmetic.

THE CUT-OFF MATH

An illustration, with its simplifications stated. Suppose the cut-off is 30 days out, and the block was sized from last year's room nights. Forty-five percent of attendees will register inside four weeks, so on cut-off day 55 percent of the audience exists. The late registrants lean drive-in, who book fewer rooms, so the room-needing audience is further along than 55 percent, but it is not complete either. Pickup on cut-off day is therefore well short of the block, and the reflex is to release rooms. The cut-off does not settle attrition; that is reconciled on actual pickup after the event. What the cut-off does is put the unsold rooms back on sale at the hotel's rate, so the fly-in attendees who register in the last four weeks pay more or stay elsewhere, and the block that could have filled does not. Maritz's advice is short: "don't reduce your hotel room block just because they haven't filled yet." Its other suggestion is to share the registration curve with the hotel so the cut-off can move.

Maritz's 2024 report lists the consequences plainly: "Missing out on revenue from bookings in the block if hotel cutoff dates have passed," "Attrition damages if the block didn't fill," and on the logistics side sold-out blocks, last-minute food and beverage adds, badge stock and staff strain.[2] Two years later the same firm's March 2026 industry trends deck puts "Late registrations negatively impacting room blocks" on its list of challenges for large conferences and trade shows, and "Sharing registration pace and attendee trends with hotel partners to minimize attrition risk" on its list of responses.[20] The agency executive quoted in Meetings Today has seen the bill: "We've seen some clients get slammed pretty hard with attrition."[7]

The pickup report and the pace report are usually two documents owned by two people. The fix in Section 6 is to put them on one page, dated by days out, so the conversation with the hotel two weeks before cut-off is about a curve rather than a count.

4.2 Sponsors want a number in month three

The second commitment is the sponsor deck. Freeman names "confirmed numbers for sponsor pitches" as one of the organizer-side incentives that attendees see through.[1] The sponsor deck that goes out in the spring quotes last year's final attendance because this year's pace would frighten everyone, and the sponsor who signed on that number wants to see it in the pace report in month three, when 45 percent of the audience has not arrived. Exhibitors are on the same curve themselves: 48 percent of exhibitor staff registered inside four weeks.[2] The honest sponsor conversation is a curve with two prior years on it, not a count, and it is easier to have if the sponsor has seen the curve before.

4.3 Budgets, freezes and forecasts

The third commitment is the budget, and it is being set in a year when costs are the main worry. In American Express Global Business Travel's forecast for 2026, based on a YouGov survey of 601 meeting professionals in July 2025, 85 percent were optimistic about the year, but 71 percent expected cost per attendee to rise, and cost was the top planning challenge for 38 percent, ahead of macroeconomic uncertainty at 32 percent, changing attendee needs at 31, and budget cuts at 30.[21] Cvent's 2026 sourcing report, from more than 1,650 planners, found 72 percent expecting event costs to rise even as 70 percent expected to run more in-person events.[22] In the Northstar and Cvent PULSE survey of more than 1,000 planners in September 2025, 40 percent expected attendance to fall by 10 percent or more in 2026.[23]

Hotel cut-off before arrival

30 days

Typical, per Maritz 2024; contracts range from 21 to 45

Attendees registering inside four weeks

45%

Maritz, 2023 data

Meeting professionals expecting cost per attendee to rise

71%

Amex GBT, July 2025 survey

Forecasting into that is harder than it was, and the people doing it say so. "One of the biggest challenges over the past year has been the sporadic freezes on business travel for government employees," the meetings manager at a scientific society told PCMA Convene in November 2025. "This has made it increasingly difficult to forecast attendance."[24] The managing director of events at an architects' institute said the year's conditions "have made it challenging to get attendees to register and travel to meetings and events."[24] An association tracked by 360 Live Media was 76 percent ahead of its 2024 registration pace early in the 2025 cycle and finished 9.5 percent behind.[25] Maritz's own client data, from more than 300 association and trade show events, shows attendance down 3 percent in 2025, with 37 percent of shows down and 25 percent up. More than half of those shows, 52 percent, lost international attendees in 2025, and international attendees are the fly-in, early-registering kind. Maritz expects "muted but stable" attendance in 2026.[20]

None of that argues for pessimism. It argues that a forecast built on the count at week eight is a guess, and a forecast built on the curve is a method. The difference is the subject of Section 6.

> **SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY**
>
> Find the cut-off date and the attrition percentage in this year's hotel contract, and write them on the pace report. Then ask the hotel for pickup by week. Most will send it.

SECTION 5

In their own words

Surveys tell you how many. People tell you how it feels. These comments are quoted verbatim from trade press interviews and one public forum, with the speaker's role and, where they work for a vendor or an agency, that affiliation. Seven people, eight quotes. Three of the quotes come from two executives at agencies that sell event marketing to associations; one comes from a registration provider.

> "It's very common to see at least 40% of an association's event attendees register within the last six weeks."

Head of marketing, 360 Live Media (an events agency serving associations), Meetings Today, August 2026[7]

> "Calendar anxiety is a real thing; committing to a multiday event even four months in advance feels risky for people."

Head of marketing, 360 Live Media, Meetings Today, August 2026[7]

> "We've seen some clients get slammed pretty hard with attrition."
>
> Vice president of marketing, Etherio (an events agency), Meetings Today, August 2026[7]

> "One of the biggest challenges over the past year has been the sporadic freezes on business travel for government employees. This has made it increasingly difficult to forecast attendance."
>
> Meetings manager, SPIE, PCMA Convene, November 2025[24]

> "I think there's this sense that late registrations are bad...yet we learned that late registrants can actually be some of our most lucrative attendees in terms of how they're spending."
>
> Market insights manager, Maritz (a registration provider), Meetings Today, April 2024[11]

> "It costs you money not to be there."
>
> Chief executive, 37signals, on charging a refundable $100 deposit, Skift Meetings, September 2026[14]

> "The act itself signals commitment. The dollar amount is less important in general."
>
> Event psychology advisor, Skift Meetings, September 2026[14]

> "DonorBox only credits the ticket purchaser. So if one person buys 5 tickets for their friends, we only see the buyer... The other 5 people are invisible in our records."
>
> Staff member at a small membership nonprofit, r/nonprofit[26]

The vendor forums show the mechanics under the quotes. In a July 2024 Cvent Community thread, an alumnae engagement coordinator asked how to pull a report of people who registered but never checked in, and the working answer was a filter on a participation field that only helps if attendance was tracked in the first place.[27] In 2023 a convention bureau's client advisory council of two dozen meeting planners named registration forecasting as their top challenge, and one member described the practice they had settled on: pre-event audits at eight, six and four weeks out, and again inside 30 days.[28] That is three years old and it is still the best practical cadence anyone has published.

Four things the comments have in common

1. **The calendar is the enemy, not the attendee.** Freezes, approvals and "calendar anxiety" push the decision later. Nobody describes a person who does not want to come.
2. **The practitioner's estimate and the datasets rhyme without matching.** One agency puts at least 40 percent inside six weeks at association events; Maritz and PheedLoop put 44 to 45 percent inside four weeks at trade shows and smaller events. Different windows, different populations, the same order of magnitude.
3. **The damage lands on contracts signed a year earlier.** Attrition, sponsor numbers and budgets were fixed when the attendee was still a name on last year's list.
4. **Nobody can count what the systems do not link.** The purchaser who hides four guests, the report that needs a field someone forgot to track, the status that did not sync. The no-show rate is only as real as the record behind it.

SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY

Ask the three people who touch registration, the hotel block and the sponsor deck to each write down the number they are working from this week. If the three numbers differ, that is the meeting to have.

SECTION 6

The playbook for a team of two

Nothing here needs a new platform. It needs a registration export with timestamps, last year's list, the hotel pickup report and a spreadsheet. Targets carry their source, or say that they are this report's recommendation.

6.1 The KPI sheet

MEASURE	WHAT TO EXPECT, WITH THE SOURCE
Share of registrations inside four weeks	45 percent at trade shows (Maritz, 2023 data); 44 percent at small and midsize live events (PheedLoop, 2026). Track yours by edition.[2,3]
Share inside two weeks, and on site	29 percent and 9 percent (Maritz, 2023 data). On-site registration is falling (Freeman, January 2026).[2,1]
Late share, first-time against repeat	47 percent against 25 percent (Maritz). Report the two lines separately on the pace report.[2]
Late share, drive-in against fly-in	62 percent against 39 percent (Maritz). Needs a postal code at registration.[2]
Show rate, paid and free	One hundred minus the median no-show: about 83 percent paid, about 72 percent free (PheedLoop, April 2026; the denominator is expected attendees). Count it only from check-ins linked to registrations.[4]
Cancellations, and registrations net of them	No published benchmark. Freeman expects more late cancellations (January 2026). Track cancellations by week and report every count net of them. This report's recommendation.[1]
Show rate, late against early registrants	Within 5 points at 55 percent of events (PheedLoop, September 2026). If yours is wider, look at your free tickets first.[3]
Add-on spend, late against early	Late registrants spent $59 more (Maritz). Use your own figure to price the tiers.[2]
Hotel pickup against block, 14 days before cut-off	No published benchmark. This report's recommendation: convert registrations to room nights with last year's rooms per registrant, split fly-in and drive-in, and review the block against the curve rather than the count.
Registrations against the same day last year	Your own curve. The number is only meaningful with the prior two editions on the same chart.

6.2 The countdown

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS	WHAT HAS TO BE TRUE IN THE SYSTEMS
Registration opens	Open when the program and add-ons are listed, not months before. If you must open early, make it a soft launch (Maritz).[2]	Every registration carries a timestamp, a ticket type and a first-time flag matched against last year's list.

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS	WHAT HAS TO BE TRUE IN THE SYSTEMS
120 to 31 days out	The main marketing push. The 31 to 60 day window spends the most on add-ons (Maritz). Tier deadlines fall here and are not extended. Pre-event audits at eight and six weeks, the first two of the cadence a planner council settled on in 2023.[2,7,28]	The pace report shows this year against the last two editions by days out, split first-time and repeat.
Cut-off minus 14 days	Hotel conversation: pickup against the curve, extension or block adjustment before the cut-off, not after.[19]	Hotel pickup by week sits on the same page as the pace report, in room nights.
Cut-off date	Unsold rooms go back to the hotel. Attrition is settled on actual pickup after the event, so keep booking attendees into the block on any post-cut-off rate you negotiated. Sponsor update goes out with the curve and the range from 6.3.[2]	The registration export and the pickup report carry the same date stamp.
Four weeks out	Plan for 45 percent still to come: badge stock, temps, food and beverage buffers. Third audit.[2]	The forecast in 6.3 is refreshed weekly.
Inside 30 days	Final audit, the last step of the 2023 cadence. First-timer messaging, not discounts. Cancellations tracked daily against last year.[28]	Registrant records flow to the app and the CRM without an export.
Event days	Check-in linked to the registration. Counts that agree between the door, the app and the CRM.	More than 90 percent of check-ins tied to a registration, PheedLoop's own threshold.[3]
Two days after	No-show and cancellation rates by ticket type and by lead-time band, from linked check-ins. Kept for next year's curve.	Attendance and cancellation status written back automatically; no-show and "status did not sync" cannot be confused.

6.3 The forecast recipe

A FORECAST THAT SURVIVES WEEK EIGHT

1. **Build the curve.** For each of the last two editions, count cumulative registrations by days before the event, and divide by that edition's final count, meaning registrations net of cancellations on the first day of the event. Now every day out has a share of final: for example, 55 percent at 28 days out.
2. **Project.** Today's count divided by the average share at today's days out is the projected final. With 1,100 registered at 28 days out and a 55 percent share, the projection is 2,000.
3. **Show the range.** Use each prior year's share separately. If one gives 52 percent and the other 58, the projection is 1,900 to 2,115, and that range is what goes to the board. If the city, the dates, the opening date or the tier deadlines changed, the prior curves are a floor and a ceiling, not an average, and the range should say so.
4. **Split it.** Repeat the recipe for first-time and repeat, and for paid and free. The repeat line will track last year; the first-time line will lag and catch up.
5. **Apply the show rate.** Multiply the projection by last year's show rate for each ticket type to get expected people in the room, which is the number the caterer and the hotel need.

This is a spreadsheet with four columns. It is also what the forecasting features described in Section 7 do, and knowing the recipe is how you judge them.

6.4 Pricing that respects how people decide

- **Tier by benefit, not only by price.** Early access to the program, limited-capacity roundtables, presenter access. The accounting association's 2025 meeting grew 7 percent on this design.[7]
- **Keep the deadline.** Every extension teaches the audience that the next one will move too.[7]
- **Shorten or flatten the early bird.** A less generous rate, or a flat rate that steps up at four weeks, aimed at the 31 to 120 day window.[2]
- **Aim discounts at first-timers.** Promo codes and group rates for people who have never been, rather than a blanket reward for the people who register early anyway.[2,13]
- **If the event is free, ask for something.** A refundable deposit or a small fee moves the show rate more than any reminder. One organizer's $100 deposit produced a 90 percent show rate against 45 percent at its earlier free event; PheedLoop's wider data puts the paid-versus-free gap at 11 points at the median.[14,4]

6.5 The data minimum

Six things have to be true for the sheet, the countdown and the recipe to work. Be honest about each line.

- [ ] Every registration has a timestamp you can export, and it survives edits, transfers and cancellations, which are recorded rather than deleted.
- [ ] Every check-in is linked to a registration, so a no-show is a person and not a difference between two totals.
- [ ] Ticket type and member type agree between the registration system and the membership system or CRM.
- [ ] Each registration carries a first-time flag, which means this year's list is matched against last year's on a person key, with the match rate reported, so a changed email or a guest under a purchaser's name does not become a new person.

- [ ] A postal code is captured and a distance from the venue is computed, so drive-in and fly-in can be split the way Maritz did at 250 miles.
- [ ] Hotel pickup by week arrives on the same page as the pace report, dated by days out.

Some cases this playbook does not settle, and a reader should know which apply. Comp registrations for speakers, exhibitors and press change the show rate and belong in their own line. A capped event has a waitlist rather than a late curve. A biennial or rotating-city event has prior curves that are older or drawn in another market, which is the floor-and-ceiling case in 6.3. Members and non-members register on different calendars, and Maritz notes that more associations now bundle membership with registration, which moves the member decision earlier still. Hybrid events need the recipe run once per format.[2]

There are three honest ways to get there, and the right one depends on your rules rather than the vendor.

- **Built-in connectors and reports** that ship with your platforms. Right when the timestamp and check-in exports exist, one ticket type covers most people, and someone on staff will run the match against last year's list by hand. Wrong when member pricing, guests under a purchaser's email or session-level check-in are involved, because most built-in connectors stop at the contact record.
- **General automation tools.** Right when a staff member owns them and has time to maintain them between events. Wrong when that person is also running the event, because nobody fixes an automation in the last four weeks.
- **A specialist build**, in-house or outside. Right when the rules are specific to your event, the deadline is show week, and nobody on staff can own it. Wrong when a report and a spreadsheet would have done the job.

> SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY
>
> Draw last year's curve. Cumulative registrations by days out, divided by the final. Two hours in a spreadsheet, and it is the most useful chart you will own this year.

SECTION 7

A decision guide for technology and data

For the reader about to buy, renew or consolidate. Dated, neutral, and explicit about what may change.

7.1 Timestamps and linked check-in are the whole game

Everything in Section 6 rests on two records: a registration with a timestamp you can export, and a check-in tied to that registration. Most platforms hold both. Fewer let you export them together, at the registration level, with the ticket type and the answers to your own questions attached. Ask for that export in the demo, for a past event, and look at whether the check-in column is a status somebody set or a scan somebody made. PheedLoop only trusted events where more than 90 percent of check-ins linked to a registration; that is a fair bar for your own system.[3]

7.2 Forecasting features are arriving, without accuracy figures

Vendors have noticed the pace report. Cvent's public release board lists a registration predictions feature that will estimate registration and attendance from historical data and show "confidence intervals or ranges"; when read for

this report in September 2026 it was listed as projected for the first quarter of 2026 and marked as in design.[29] RainFocus tells its customers that registration patterns are predictable again and that its data supports more accurate forecasting.[10] No vendor publishes how accurate its forecast has been. Before paying for one, ask three things: how many prior editions it needs, whether it shows a range or a point, and whether it can be split by ticket type and first-time status. Then run the recipe in 6.3 beside it for one cycle.

7.3 Consolidation, and what happens to your curve

Cvent spent about $700 million on two acquisitions in December 2025, after four in 2024.[30] Consolidation is not bad for organizers, but a migration is where registration history goes missing, and the curve in Section 6 needs at least two editions of timestamps. Before any move, export every past edition at the registration level, with dates and ticket types, and keep it somewhere the new vendor cannot touch.

7.4 A postal code is personal data

The split that matters most in this report, drive-in against fly-in, needs an address or postal code, and the first-time flag needs last year's list. Both are personal data. Twenty US states had comprehensive privacy laws in effect at the start of 2026, and four more enacted laws in the first half of the year, for 24 in total.[31] Using your own registration history to plan your own event is ordinary first-party use. Sharing it with a hotel or a sponsor is not, and needs its own consent language at registration. This report is not legal advice. It is a reason to have that conversation before registration opens.

7.5 Ten questions to ask before signing

1. Can we export every registration with its original timestamp, ticket type, cancellation status and our own questions, for any past event, even after edits?
2. Is check-in a scan linked to the registration, or a status a person sets?
3. Can the pace report show this year against prior editions by days out, split by ticket type?
4. How do you flag a first-time registrant, and against which list?
5. How is member type kept in sync with our membership system, in both directions?
6. Can a purchaser's guests be individual records with their own check-in, and do cancellations and refunds write back to the CRM?
7. Can we set tier deadlines by benefit, not only by price, and stop an extension being made by accident?
8. If you offer a forecast, what history does it need and does it show a range?
9. What happens to our registration history and our contract if you are acquired?
10. Who is on call during our event, by name?

> **SOMETHING TO DO ON MONDAY**
>
> Send questions 1 and 2 to your current registration vendor by email. If the answer to either is "not at the registration level," the pace report cannot be built from that system.

SECTION 8

Methodology, timeliness and sources

How this report was made

This is a desk-research report. It draws mostly on industry research published between 2024 and September 2026, plus three older practice descriptions (a 2017 hotel cut-off guide, a 2023 planner council cadence and an undated vendor-forum thread) that are dated where they appear, read in the original where the publisher makes it public and otherwise through the trade press that reported it. Two behavioral datasets carry most of the weight, and each has a population the text names: Maritz's Registration Insights Report analyses 2021 to 2023 registrations at 30 trade shows that Maritz registers, and its distribution figures are 2023 data, the last of their kind published; PheedLoop's Event Data Lab reports, published in 2026, analyse events run on PheedLoop's platform; PheedLoop does not date the events or describe its customers, and the size bands it publishes show many small events and many free ones. Both firms sell registration software. Neither was interviewed or paid, and no vendor reviewed the text. No Event Data Pro client data was used. Practitioner quotes are verbatim from trade press interviews and one public Reddit thread, attributed by role, with agency and vendor affiliations disclosed. Where two credible sources disagree, both are shown with the reason they differ. Before publication, the full draft was checked against every source a second time by a reviewer briefed to argue against it, and the text was corrected where the argument held.

Three things were left out on purpose. The "40 to 60 percent no-show at free events" range that circulates in vendor blogs has no dated primary source and is not used; PheedLoop's measured 28 percent median is used instead. Figures on the effect of text-message and email reminders on no-shows come from healthcare appointment research and are not used for events. Consumer ticketing data on last-minute purchases describes concerts and festivals, a different population, and is not used. One widely repeated version of the Maritz first-timer figure, that 75 percent of first-timers register late, is a misreading of the report, which says 47 percent; the report's own number is used.

One limit deserves its own sentence. No study here shows that organizers who redesign their pricing or their pace reporting end up with more attendees. The Maritz spend findings are associations, not causes, and the deposit experiment is one event. The case made is narrower: that late registration and no-shows are two problems with two different predictors, and that a team can measure both from records it already holds.

How fresh each number is

Every statistic in this report is dated in the text or in the source list. The table below shows when the main sources refresh, so a reader can judge what may have moved since September 23, 2026.

SOURCE	EDITION USED	REFRESHES	NEXT EXPECTED
Freeman End-of-Year Trends Recap	January 2026 (2025 data)	Annual, January	January 2027
Maritz Registration Insights Report	2024 (2021 to 2023 data)	Not refreshed since	Unknown; the March 2026 trends deck covers attendance, not timing
Maritz Industry Trends	March 2026	Roughly quarterly	None seen since March 2026; check

SOURCE	EDITION USED	REFRESHES	NEXT EXPECTED
PheedLoop Event Data Lab	#05 (April), #06 (May, updated September), #09 (September 10, 2026); #10 (September 22, 2026) covers exhibitor leads and is not used	Roughly monthly	Ongoing; check for a report on reminders, cancellations or pricing
Freeman "What's Keeping Audiences Away"	May 2026	Annual, spring	Spring 2027
Bizzabo State of Events and program benchmarks	2025 survey; March 2026 platform data	Annual	Early 2027
Goldcast B2B Webinar Benchmark	2026 (2025 data)	Annual	Early 2027
Amex GBT Global Meetings and Events Forecast	2026 edition (December 2025)	Annual, autumn	2027 edition due around now
Cvent Planner Sourcing Report	2026 (blog summaries January and March 2026)	Annual	Early 2027
Northstar and Cvent PULSE	September 2025 edition	Quarterly; a July 2026 edition exists	Check the July 2026 edition's attendance figure before quoting
Skift Meetings Megatrends	2026 (December 2025)	Annual, December	December 2026
PCMA Convene Meetings Market Survey	32nd (fielded September 2025)	Annual, fielded September	33rd, December 2026
Cvent product release board	Read September 2026	Continuous	Check the status of registration predictions before quoting
State privacy law trackers	February and June 2026	Continuous	Recount before acting

A note on where this comes from

Event Data Pro connects registration systems, event apps, CRMs and membership systems for conferences, and the people who wrote this see the six records in Section 6.5 every week, usually in four places. That is the bias to be aware of. It is also why the report is about what to measure and not about what to buy. If you would like a second pair of eyes on whether your registration timestamps, check-ins and last year's list can be put on one page, we offer a free consultation and will say honestly if a built-in report is enough. Write to contact@eventdata.pro.

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Appendix: chart data

Figure 1. Share of attendees by when they registered, 2023 (percent)

MORE THAN 4 WEEKS	4 WEEKS	3 WEEKS	2 WEEKS	FINAL WEEK	ON SITE
55	9	7	7	13	9

Maritz, 2024 report, 2023 data. Inside four weeks: 45. Inside two weeks: 29. Week of the event: 22. Comparators in the text: 23 percent inside two weeks in 2019; 24 percent in the week of the event in 2022.

Figure 2. Share of registrations by lead time, 467 events, 2026 (percent)

SAME WEEK	1 TO 2 WEEKS	2 TO 4 WEEKS	1 TO 2 MONTHS	2 TO 3 MONTHS	3 TO 6 MONTHS	6+ MONTHS
14.4	11.2	18.6	25.3	15.0	13.4	2.1

PheedLoop, September 2026; 216,282 registrations. Median lead time 35 days; 25th percentile 13 days; 75th percentile 68 days.

Figure 3. Share registering inside four weeks, by group (percent)

PAIR	FIRST VALUE	SECOND VALUE
Repeat attendees / first-time attendees	25	47
Fly in / drive in (within 250 miles)	39	62
Medical and healthcare conferences / food and restaurant shows	29	54
Attendees / exhibitor staff	45	48

Figure 4. Spend on add-ons per attendee, by registration window (US dollars)

WITHIN 30 DAYS	31 TO 60 DAYS	61 TO 90 DAYS	91 TO 120 DAYS	MORE THAN 120 DAYS
338	370	301	281	278

Figure 5. Median no-show rate, free against paid (percent)

EVENTS	FREE	PAID
All (free n = 389, paid n = 683)	28	17
Small, 10 to 49 expected	37	17
Large, 500 or more expected	24	18

PheedLoop, April 2026. Overall median across all 1,070+ events: about 20; mean 29. By size, all events: 10 to 49, 32; 50 to 149, 23; 150 to 499, 19; 500 to 999, 18; 1,000 or more, 19.

Figure 6. No-show rate by registration lead time, pooled across 4 events (percent)

SAME WEEK	1 TO 2 WEEKS	2 TO 4 WEEKS	1 TO 2 MONTHS	2 TO 3 MONTHS	3 TO 6 MONTHS	6+ MO
42.4	40.0	36.2	28.6	26.3	24.2	18.

PheedLoop, September 2026. Within the same event (374 events, 30-day line): early registrants 84.1 percent median attendance, late 80.8; median difference 0.6 points; gap under 5 points at 55 percent of events; late registrants more reliable at 44 percent of events. Same-week attendance at free events 28.2 percent, at paid events 72.8.